



Photos courtesy of Louisville District

(Left) The core water safety audience, males ages 18-35, try on self-inflating life jackets and meet Bobber, the Water Safety Dog. (Right) Bobber and USACE personnel greet the crowd at a NASCAR track.

Water safety message goes *NASCAR*

Here's a grim statistic – males between the ages of 18 and 35 make up the largest group of drowning victims at U.S. Army Corps of Engineers water recreation areas.

Here's a statistic that's more fun – males between the ages of 18 and 44 make up the largest audience at NASCAR races.

And that's why the logo of Bobber, the Water Safety Dog is roaring around the track on the hood and tailgate of a racing pickup truck at five NASCAR races this summer. USACE park rangers and Bobber himself are also taking the water safety message directly to the people at those same races.

During the 2009 National Resource Management Conference in Nashville, USACE park rangers and managers discussed several ideas to market the Corps' water safety message. Diane Stratton, park manager at Louisville District's Rough River Lake, introduced the concept of promoting water safety at NASCAR events.

Stratton's idea was well received. The next step was to research demographic data about NASCAR audiences to determine how best to reach the target population. Marketing firms and NASCAR officials were contacted, and the data they provided positively supported the concept.

Louisville District personnel reviewed different types of events offered by NASCAR, and determined that the Camping World Truck Series events would be the best venue for the water safety message. Average attendance at a NASCAR Camping World Truck event is 50,000 people, and 800,000 watch the race on television. Of those at the track and watching the race at home, 63 percent are males between the ages of 18 and 44.

Stratton and her team adopted the message, "Like Your Favorite Driver Wears Their Protective Gear, We Want YOU to Wear Your Gear When You Are on the Water."

Discussions with the Corps' National Operations Center for Water Safety, the Office of Council and the Contracting Division in Louisville District identified the team's authorities and parameters. Using current authorities that allow USACE educational outreach at public



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Bobber poses with the racing truck that carries the USACE safety message.

venues, the contract was written to secure exhibit space and provide USACE staff with venue access.

The contract was managed by the Louisville District team, but other USACE districts were invited to participate. In total, Wilmington, Savannah, Rock Island and Fort Worth districts joined Louisville District in this unique venture to promote water safety.

The contract, which provided space at five Camping World Truck Series events, was awarded April 27 to Ride to The Rock for Autism, Inc., a non-profit group. The

events this year are May 20 in Charlotte, Va., July 7 in Kentucky, July 16 in Iowa, July 29 at Indianapolis, and Nov. 4 in Texas.

The water safety logo of Bobber, the Water Safety Dog was featured on the hood and tailgate of a Toyota Tundra racing truck. The logo and graphics for the "Wear Your Gear" messages at the exhibits were designed by Tony Isbell, visual information specialist, who works with the USACE National Water Safety Program. Isbell created Bobber, the Water Safety Dog.

During the events, USACE park rangers are granted access to pit row, camping areas around the track, garage area and grandstands to promote water safety. Water safety public service announcements are aired on local radio stations, and on-the-spot interviews may be conducted with park rangers at the event by SPEED Channel, NASCAR Race Hub and other media sources at the race.

The USACE water safety team has taken their message to three races. Park rangers from Wilmington and Savannah districts who worked the May 20 event noted, "We were able to put a face on the Corps of Engineers that many people had never been exposed to, one that had their safety and well-being in the forefront."

Park rangers from Louisville District who worked the July 7 event had 100 direct water safety contacts every 30 minutes from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Col. Keith Landry, commander of Louisville District, Stratton and Bobber were invited up on stage during driver introductions. The announcer thanked USACE for their efforts during the 2011 flood events, and also broadcast a water safety message. The driver introductions were aired on SPEED Channel and viewed by more than 1 million viewers.

"The photos we took show the success in reaching the target audience with the water safety message, and personnel in the participating districts look forward to the three coming NASCAR events," Stratton said. "We hope this message will be put into action and result in lives saved and injuries prevented."

(Diane Stratton of Louisville District wrote this article.)